

March 24, 2002
Sunday of Orthodoxy

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

The humanity of Adam is the origin of all humanity. Every human being, that is to say, including Eve, comes forth from Adam. Consequently, from a theological perspective the whole of humanity fell in Adam's fall, because he was font and father of our race (cf. Romans 5:14; 1 Corinthians 15:22,45).

From the perspective of chronology, nonetheless, Adam was not the first human sinner, for Genesis 3 testifies that that distinction belonged to Eve. Hence the rather corny story of postlapsarian Adam, pointing out the Garden of Eden to young Cain and Abel, "Boys, that garden there yonder's where y'ur Ma ate us out of house and home." Plainer and more to the point is the testimony of St. Paul: "Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression" (1 Timothy 2:14).

Eve, moreover, was not only the first person to commit sin, but also the first to give scandal - to cause someone else to sin. "So she also gave to her husband with her," says the Sacred Text, "and he ate" (Genesis 3:6). Hers was the offense of Jeroboam, so to speak, sinning and teaching Israel to sin.

Probably because she was the world's first offender, Holy Scripture goes into some detail to describe the temptation to which Eve succumbed. Her temptation serving as a kind of paradigm of all temptation, Eve stands as the Bible's first negative model of the moral life; her lapse provides the initial description of how the demons deal with the human soul.

Perhaps, indeed, St. Paul was indicating as much, when he wrote to the church at Corinth, "I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:3). Thus, if we want to understand how temptation functions in human psychology, we can hardly do better than to examine the temptation of Eve.

Prior to succumbing, Eve is tempted in three stages: (1) "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food," (2) "that it was pleasant to the eyes," (3) "and a tree desirable to

make one wise" - "she took of the fruit and ate" (Genesis 3:6). We may reasonably say that these three steps in the temptation correspond to "all that is in the world" - namely, "the lust of the flesh ['good for food'], the lust of the eyes ['pleasant to the eyes'], and the pride of life ['desirable to make one wise']" (1 John 2:16). At each stage in the temptation, Eve indulges a specious reasoning begotten of her passions. Objective moral strictures are not consulted. Eve's fall results from a distorted pattern of thinking, for her thoughts are dictated by her desires.

And how does Eve stumble into this tripartite temptation? By giving ear to the deceptive arguments of the serpent. The latter begins with a factual question: "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" The idea is preposterous, and Eve hastens to correct the questioner. She feels justified in this, of course, because in answering the serpent she can even feel herself to be God's defender. Alas, however, a conversation with the deceiver has therewith begun, and fickle Eve is a poor match for him. Her first mistake, then, is tactical. She should never have answered him at all.

Eve's mind now engaged, the deceiver prompts her to question the very reason that God gave for the command, "for in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die." In fact, Eve has never heard God say these words, for they were spoken before she was formed from Adam's rib. Eve knew of the prohibition only through Adam. That is to say, God's mandate, as far as Eve knows, is simply a moral tradition, perhaps subject to improvement. Why need she submit her moral judgment to the apodictic command that Adam had shared with her? Why take Adam's word for it? She, after all, has a mind of her own. She is just as intelligent as Adam, who after all has not really been in this world much longer than she. She, too, is smart. She can figure things out for herself. And thus did our ancient mother commence the process of her own personal moral theory.

St Paul describes Eve's beguilement as a corruption from "simplicity"; (2 Corinthians 11:3). In place of God's emphatic command, known solely through the moral tradition available to her, Eve declared the autonomy of her own thought, not pausing to consider that her thinking was hardly more than a veneer over the perverse assertion of her passions.

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